

THE TERRORIST-DRUG NEXUS: *Why Drug Trafficking Is a Serious Security Issue*

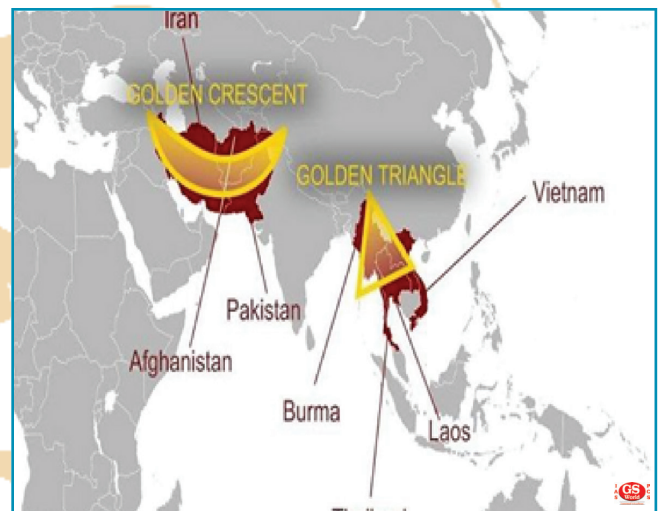
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Paper - III
(Internal Security)

The narcotics trade is assuming dangerous proportions all over the world. It is a social problem that harms youth and families and the money it generates is diverted for disruptive activities that have bearings on national security. The issue has kept security agencies and law enforcement agencies on the tenterhooks. India is no exception.

Major Global Regions of Drugs and India

Traditionally India has been seen as sandwiched between the Death (Golden) Crescent and Death (Golden) Triangle. The country is being flooded with drugs, especially heroin and methamphetamine, from these two regions by drug lords indirectly supported by intelligence setups. Nearly 90 per cent of the world's demand for these drugs is being met from these two regions. India is both a big market and a transit route for other countries.



Money generated in this illicit trade is phenomenal. There are indications that parts of Pakistan adjoining Afghanistan are also used by Pakistani drug traffickers to convert Afghan opium to heroin. The Shan and Kachin provinces of Myanmar bordering China also pose challenges. These heroin and methamphetamine-producing areas have porous borders and are, reportedly, under the control of rebel groups, indirectly supported by the Chinese. Illicit arms are manufactured here and supplied to underground groups active in India.

The maritime route has also become very active after the recent developments in Jammu and Kashmir. The use of drones to supply drugs and weapons across the border in Punjab is a new phenomenon and law enforcement agencies are working out strategies to neutralise this. The Indian Coast Guard (ICG), in conjunction with the intelligence agencies, has been making big seizures frequently. ICG has developed a good synergy not only with the security agencies but also with the coast guards of Sri Lanka, Maldives

and Bangladesh. It seized 2,160 kgs of meth in two different instances recently near the Andaman and Nicobar Islands. The drugs were destined for Thailand from Myanmar. Investigations have indicated the connection of drug traffickers from across borders with terrorist organisations like Lashkar-e-Toiba and Hizbul Mujahideen. The illegal money is used for terror activities sponsored by the ISI.

India has surprisingly also become a hot destination for cocaine, the supply of which is controlled by South American drug cartels. Recent investigations have revealed the connection of these cartels with NRIs based in Canada, Australia, Singapore, Hong Kong and several European countries along with local drug lords and gangsters in India, who have links with Khalistani terrorists and the ISI in Pakistan. The role of the fugitive don Dawood Ibrahim and his gang has been under scanner.

New Sources of Financing and Transit of Drugs

Studies reveal that 62 per cent of the darknet is being used for illicit drug trafficking. Darknet markets are disrupting traditional drug markets because of their anonymity and low risks.

Cryptocurrency payments and doorstep deliveries, through courier services, have made darknet transactions attractive. Concerted and coordinated efforts of all the agencies will be required to tackle this growing threat. The success rate in catching traffickers using the darknet has been very low the world over. However, in January-February, the Narcotics Control Bureau busted an organised racket of darknet vendors and arrested several Indian nationals.

Their international counterparts were exposed for the first time. Technical surveillance followed by basic policing methods led to the seizure of large consignments of drugs and the arrest of the gang. The operation exposed various international connections.

Government efforts to stop drug trafficking:

- The Ministry of Home Affairs has adopted a three-pronged formula of strengthening of institutional structure, empowerment and co-ordination of all narco agencies and comprehensive awareness campaign to crack down on narcotics.
- The Narco-Coordination Center has been set up in November 2016.
- All North Eastern states have constituted Anti-Narcotics Task Force (ANTF) as a single nodal point for all issues related to Narcotics. In order to make the performance effective in this direction, the government has laid constant emphasis on inter-departmental coordination under the 'Whole of Government Approach'.
- A fund named 'National Fund for the Control of Narcotic Substances' was established by the government.
- 'Project Sunrise' was launched by the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare in the year 2016 in the North-Eastern states.
- Various provisions of the NDPS Act are being implemented strictly. Setting up of fast track courts to ensure speedy trial has also been considered.

What have been the results of the government's efforts to stop drug trafficking in the last few years?

- A total of 1257 cases were registered between 2006-2013, which increased by 152 percent to 3172 between 2014-2022. The total number of arrests increased by 260 percent to 4,888 as against 1,362 during the same period. During 2006-2013, 1.52 lakh kg of drugs were seized which doubled to 3.30 lakh kg between 2014-2022. Drugs worth Rs 768 crore were seized between 2006-2013, which has increased 25 times to Rs 20 thousand crore between 2014-2022.

Drug cartels all over the world are networked and are using the darknet in a big way for trafficking narcotics, especially pharmaceutical opioids/synthetic drugs made in labs using deadly chemical precursors.

A new trend has emerged wherein organised gangs, which primarily used to carry out extortion activities in their local areas, are getting hooked to this network, and are being used for drug trafficking and gun running. Quick, and more, money attracts them to such activities, but knowingly or unknowingly they are getting into the trap of ISI and Khalistani elements settled abroad, especially in Canada, Germany, the UK, USA. It is easier for these terrorist groups to use these networks because they get ready-made logistics to carry out their activities. The nexus between terrorists and organised gangs/underworld is a new and disturbing trend, which has to be tackled effectively by security agencies.



Expected Question

Que. How many of the following countries are/are part of the Golden Triangle region associated with the drug trade?

1. Thailand
2. Myanmar
3. Laos

Select the correct answer using the code given below

- (a) Only one
- (b) Only two
- (c) All three
- (d) None

Answer : C

Mains Expected Question & Format

Que.: 'Drug trafficking is a major challenge for India's internal security, in which the role of non-state actors is very important. In such a situation, the Government of India needs to make efforts at the national and international level to deal with this challenge.' make a comment.

Answer Format :

- ❖ Start the question with the statistics of drug trafficking in India.
- ❖ How is this a big challenge to India's internal security.
- ❖ What is the role of non-state actors in this?
- ❖ Discuss the efforts made by the Government of India so far at national and international level.
- ❖ Finally give a brief conclusion.

Note: - The question of the main examination given for practice is designed keeping in mind the upcoming UPSC mains examination. Therefore, to get an answer to this question, you can take the help of this source as well as other sources related to this topic.